

OPINION: Revisiting CFAC pollution with more urgency

By Bill Baum | Posted: Tuesday, July 7, 2015 6:25 pm

This is my third attempt at trying to inspire common ordinary citizens to quit being apathetic and take responsibility for your own lives by mobilizing and taking action.

The Columbia Falls Aluminum Company pollution still lies in the ground and in the water table you drink from and bathe in... from Columbia Falls all the way downstream along the Flathead River to Flathead Lake... having a deep underground hydrological effect on thousands of personal, individual, unprotected wells along the way. In my opinion, this dangerous situation has become another "Libby."

One thing has changed though: Local government elected and appointed officials and local businesspeople have become active in participating in monthly meetings, finally, but only in order to lend their names to pleasing voters or increasing commerce for their respective businesses. It's all for show. It is why I bypass bothering to contact them and elevate my criticism to county, state, and federal elected and appointed officials. But, those people do not live in the area and are safe from the threat to their health... and so have no sense of danger.

There is much being written about all the "red tape" and "jumping through hoops" that must precede a multi-years clean-up: Slow, laborious, field investigations to PROVE there is death-causing contamination; then feasibility studies and remedial work plans; roadmaps and comprehensive assessments; evaluation of alternatives; endless, mindless meetings to forestall commencement of the clean-up itself.

What has not changed is a lack of urgency, with time being of the essence, to save human lives and wildlife. People will lose years at the end of their lives due to this inaction. Mother Nature never intended these toxic (poisonous) chemicals (cyanide, fluoride, arsenic, lead, manganese, et al) to be inside our bodies and we cannot effectively metabolize and eliminate them.

Be proactive, go ask your doctor. And then start attending the regular meetings at the Columbia Falls Community Center on Nucleus Avenue, on the second Thursday of each month at 6 p.m. Be feisty... raise hell... live a long time.

To date, I have received a personal letter from our governor, Steve Bullock, Democrat, promising to enter the fray and participate in obtaining federal Environmental Protection Agency Superfund status to solve the clean-up project effort. He followed up and did so, but it cost me his friendship for embarrassing him publicly with my newspaper op-ed goading him into it. (What else was I to do... since my e-mails to him are screened and filtered from him seeing them?)

I also met with U.S. Rep. Ryan Zinke, Republican, who admonished the federal EPA Superfund approach as he prefers to allow the Montana Department of Environmental Quality to spearhead the clean-up... claiming they would be more effective. His reasoning is that he doesn't want to adversely affect local property values and cause a "black eye" for attracting businesses to the Columbia Falls area if it has a Superfund label stigma. Human and wildlife health and longevity would have to become secondary to commerce. (It is the Republican way of doing business.)

In the meantime, from the safety of my own homestead many miles upstream along the Flathead River, I do continue to commute to work and recreate in Columbia Falls... but always bring bottled water to drink and go home to shower after gym workouts. "God helps those who help themselves."

Baum is a resident of the Badrock Canyon.